



Homily for 6/2/2019

The Ascension of the Lord, Year C

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*Thus Passes the Glory of the World*

In Papal Coronations from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century till before the Second Vatican Council, the pope was reminded that all of the pomp and circumstance, gildings and buildings around him were but a drop in the bucket of the ocean of true majesty that belongs to God alone and that he, though surrounded by worldly power, should not get too caught up in the world. To this end, as part of the ceremony a servant would burn up a cloth in front of him and would declare '*Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*' - "Thus passes the Glory of the World!" Indeed '*O quam cito transit gloria mundi* [Oh how quickly the glory of the world passes away]' *De Imitatione Christi*, Thomas à Kempis

Wordliness obviously bleeds over into the secular world of society and politics.

Modernism, at least the secular/political sort, is the fruit of humanity's errant belief that man is the measure of all things and that he is capable, by himself, of progressing towards perfection. Utopia on earth is the modernist's ideal, and it is supposed that science and technology are eventually going to free us from all that hinders humanity's progress. Modernism is noted for its rejection of ancient wisdom, especially religion, and its embrace of all things new - hence the term 'modernism'. Scientific knowledge is seen as the savior of the fallen state of humanity. It is the theory that - just given time - humanity will come to a great equilibrium, universal justice and experience utopia. This type of thinking reigned in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It reigned until it was proven wrong by two World Wars, a Great Depression, Civil Rights struggles and a host of other societal ills that engulfed the world, especially in the West, despite amazing and mind-boggling scientific progress. *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*

Postmodernism is the disillusionment experienced by the failure of modernism to perform as promised. It is the disenchantment with the world that has left many adrift in a sea of relativism, subjectivism, skepticism and anti-authoritarian malaise. Just look at the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century till today. Look at the disintegration of man from the so-called 'sexual revolution' to the 'gender dysphoria' of today. There is a general distrust of authority. Rational thought and objective truth is replaced by relativism and subjectivism. The only constants are the fickle and fleeting passions that are easily roused for nefarious motive and instrumentalized for worldly gain. Ideologues have reduced civil discourse to emotional manipulation. *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*.

And yet, humanity still tends to strive for something more. "O men of Galilee! Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" There is still an indomitable spirit in mankind to reach for things higher and nobler even if, in many parts, there is an *a priori* rejection of the very answer to man's longing: Jesus Christ. Chesterton once quipped, "It is not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting, rather it has been found hard and left untried." And again he said, "Opponents of Christianity will believe anything but Christianity."

I note how many people are ready to jump on the latest guru's bandwagon and become a devotee of some esoteric eastern pseudo-religion, just to arrive at the same wisdom that our Western ancestors in faith have been preaching since God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush! And yet, if you mention the name of Jesus Christ or suggest that the Christian Faith is the answer, there is a very real danger these days of being ostracized or called a 'fanatic' or labeled for 'hate speech!' It is a certain adolescent rebellion that doesn't want to hear truth from the mouth of a parent, but instead seeks out 'alternatives' from the whisperings of the world, just to be jarred back to the hard and unavoidable rock of objective truth by the school of hard knocks. Either you submit to reality - like those who convert or revert to Catholicism - or you close your ears to it and pretend that everything is 'just fine,' like the aging drug and sex addict, whose body is a billboard to the ravishes of a life of dissipation, but who insists *his* is the enlightened path!



The big mistake progressives, like modernists, make is thinking that we can somehow eliminate all injustice here on earth, without God. Or eliminate all poverty, by ourselves, without God. Or eliminate all suffering without reference to God. And then the despair of the post-modernists is made worse by rejecting the notion that maybe God was the answer all along! Progress towards justice and helping people out of destitution and grave affliction is good. But Progressivism, as an ideology, is to create a false God. Its fatal flaw is to assume that this world is all that there is, either with a naïve attempt to perfect it by sheer will or to wallow in despair when it proves futile. This is the same fatal flaw - even for movements within the Church like liberation theology - that stems from the materialistic and atheistic philosophies of Marxism.

On the other hand, the wisdom of the Church handed down dogmatically in the deposit of faith declares that justice, true riches, freedom and complete joy are found only with God in Heaven - and that through Jesus Christ and the movement of the Holy Spirit there are glimpses and pockets of heaven on earth, but they are appetizers, *antipasti* - teasers of something far greater than this world could ever contain. The Wisdom the Church brings forth is one of embracing with forgiveness the injustice of the cross rather than retaliating an eye for an eye; of identifying with the poor man rather than eliminating him; of accepting suffering joyfully for the sake of the Name rather than prizing the passing pleasures of this world.

Politics has a worldly end, and yet we have made it out as a new religion. Politicians sell utopia to the willing masses but cannot fulfill their promise because it is impossible this side of heaven. *Sic Transit Gloria mundi!* When we stop trying to eliminate the poor and rather simply love them and serve them, then we will make true Christian progress towards heaven. When we stop trying to eliminate all injustice and just reckon with the person in front of us, remembering that we will stand before the eternal judgment seat of God, then we will have made true progress towards heaven. When we stop trying to eliminate all suffering and rather turn and see the value of suffering for love's sake, then we will have made true progress towards our heavenly homeland.

The Church has been accompanying humanity through this adolescent rebellion of modernism and then the great teenage malaise of postmodern indifferentism. And she has continued to whisper the truth that **this world is not enough**. We are made for so much more. We will not find our true happiness here below. No mountain, no animal, no bank account, no position nor office; no lover, nor spouse will ever be enough for the human soul. God alone suffices.

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God means to restore mankind to his right ordering and end. Liturgy, what we do here in this space and time, is the re-orientation of man to right worship of the God in whose image we have been made. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote in his book, *Spirit of the Liturgy*: "The glory of God is the living man, but the life of man is the vision of God", says St. Irenaeus, getting to the heart of what happens when man meets God on the mountain in the wilderness. . . [Liturgy] exists in order to communicate this vision and to give life in such a way that glory is given to God." Again he says, "worship... is essential for the right kind of human existence in the world. It is so precisely, because it reaches beyond everyday life. Worship gives us a share in heaven's mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from that divine world into ours." (p. 21)

Just like we can get caught up in the daily grind and become workaholics, in the same way, in the spiritual life, we have to be careful of being 'world-aholics'. Too often we have shaped our liturgy to please our mundane sensibilities without contemplating that perhaps the liturgy was meant to form and shape our sensibilities towards the divine. That is why we step out of the world on the Sabbath. This is *Dies Domini* [the Lord's Day], not ours. And we set foot in heaven - even if only for a moment - not just another version of earth.



These modern times have been a grand experiment, in which we have courted the world, as if a mistress, instead of the true spouse of our soul to whom we are promised. The world made many promises that she couldn't fulfill. We have discovered that it was a fleeting relationship. Perhaps it is now time for us to repent and believe in the Gospel. Now is the time to turn back to the true spouse of our soul and seek fidelity to the ancient promises and vows of humanity and God in the new and eternal covenant of Jesus Christ.

Belief in Christ was audacious at the beginning of the Church. It is even more audacious and essential in our day when there is so much confusion about what it means to be human. On this Ascension Day, renew your promise to follow the Risen and Ascended one, that where the head goes so too we, the body, may follow. Let us do God homage; let us return to Jerusalem with great joy; let us praise God in His holy Temple!

May Jesus Christ be praised!